United Nations PBC/11/LBR/2

General Assembly
Security Council

Distr.: General
1 May 2017

Original: English

Peacebuilding Commission
Eleventh session
Liberia configuration

Review of progress in the implementation of the statement of mutual commitments on peacebuilding in Liberia

Fifth progress report

I. Introduction

1. The present report provides updates on the statement of mutual commitments on peacebuilding in Liberia and targets endorsed in April 2016 by the Liberia configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission and the Government of Liberia, outlining the priority commitments for the engagement between them (see PBC/10/LBR/1).[1] In the statement, the Government of Liberia and the Peacebuilding Commission agreed to undertake an initial review of the statement within a year of its adoption and a more thorough review within a year of the installation of the new Government. The present report is an assessment of progress in the implementation of the current statement of mutual commitments covering the period from 1 January 2016 to 31 March 2017.

2. At the request of the Government of Liberia, on 27 May 2010, Liberia was placed on the agenda of the Peacebuilding Commission. The first statement of mutual commitments on peacebuilding in Liberia between the Government of Liberia and the Commission was adopted on 16 November 2010 (PBC/4/LBR/2), following an assessment mission by the Commission to Liberia.

3. The first review of the implementation of the statement of mutual commitments was conducted in 2011; the outcome document modified the original statement and created new commitments and targets (PBC/6/LBR/2). The document was adopted by the Liberia configuration on 9 May 2012. The second review focused on the main advancements and challenges that had emerged between 1 August 2011 and 30 September 2012 and was adopted on 20 March 2013. The third review covered the period from 1 October 2012 to 31 December 2013; the review outcome was adopted on 20 March 2014. The fourth review was delayed owing to the outbreak of the Ebola virus disease in Liberia in 2014. The review

[1] The statement of mutual commitments on peacebuilding in Liberia adopted in April 2016 is an updated version of the original statement of mutual commitments adopted in 2010.

Please recycle

covered the period from 1 January to 31 December 2014, and the review outcome was adopted on 6 July 2015. The present updated statement of mutual commitments was endorsed by the Liberia configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission and the Government of Liberia in April 2016.

4. The present report focuses on the status of implementation from 1 January 2016 to 31 March 2017 and draws upon the progress reports provided by the Government of Liberia, inputs of the members of the Liberia configuration, mission reports of the Chair of the Liberia configuration and results from discussions held in Monrovia in October 2016.

5. In December 2016, the Security Council, in its resolution 2333 (2016), requested the Secretary-General to prepare, within 90 days from the adoption of the resolution, a well-developed peacebuilding plan to direct the role of the United Nations system and other relevant partners, including multilateral and bilateral actors, in supporting the transition of Liberia. In response to the request by the Council, a peacebuilding plan was developed jointly by the United Nations system in Liberia and the Government of Liberia in collaboration with national and international stakeholders and presented to the Council on 4 April 2017. The peacebuilding plan builds upon the long-standing engagement by the international community to support the post-war recovery of Liberia. The plan identifies key actions to take place before the departure of the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) (phase I) and outlines medium- and long-term engagements that will be required to ensure the sustainability of peace after 31 March 2018, when the substantive mandate of UNMIL ends (phase II), with an emphasis on the role that should be played by the United Nations country team and international partners during, and especially after, the transition process.

6. The peacebuilding plan foresees a role for the Peacebuilding Commission (see S/2017/282, para. 67): the new Government of Liberia, the United Nations system, the Commission, bilateral and multilateral actors, regional organizations and representatives of Liberian civil society will initiate the review of the progress made during phase I of the plan before the departure of UNMIL. The review will lead to an agreement of priority activities and financing required for phase II, and reaffirm the management arrangements for monitoring the plan's implementation. This process will encompass the final review of the statement of mutual commitments and also explore options for underwriting phase II of the peacebuilding plan with a framework for mutual accountability. During phase II, it is expected that regular progress meetings will continue to be held and include the Commission.

7. The peacebuilding priority areas identified in the statement of mutual commitments are security sector development, the strengthening of the rule of law, the promotion of national reconciliation, and peaceful and inclusive elections in 2017. The priorities of the statement of mutual commitments are affected by a number of cross-cutting issues which are important for sustainable peace in the country. These include decentralization, gender equality and women's empowerment, and a focus on youth.

II. Commitments by the Government of Liberia

A. Security sector development

1. Accelerate the implementation of the Government of Liberia plan for the transition of the United Nations Mission in Liberia and prioritize a whole-Government approach to completing the security transition in a timely manner by the deadline of 30 June 2016

8. The reporting period saw the completion of the security transition from UNMIL to the Government on 30 June 2016. In accordance with the transition plan of the Government of Liberia, eight critical security tasks — explosive ordnance disposal, maritime patrolling, VIP protection responsibilities, prison management, static guard and advisory services, cash transfer, small arms management and importation and border management — were assumed by the Government of Liberia by 30 June 2016.

9. The transition plan, including 205 benchmark activities, was estimated to have cost $104 million. The Government allocated $10 million in its 2015/16 national budget and an additional $2 million in its 2016/17 budget. As of March 2017, the overall completion rate of the transition plan was 43 per cent. Of the 113 key activities prioritized by the joint implementation group in April 2016, 39 activities (35 per cent) had been completed, 50 (44 per cent) were formally ongoing, 8 (7 per cent) had not started and 16 (14 per cent) were considered by the Government to be "on hold" owing to policy changes or insufficient funds.

2. To enhance security sector architecture and governance by expediting legislative and policy reform, including the passage and implementation of the Police Act, Immigration Services Act and Firearms and Ammunition Control Act, and by undertaking organizational reform that includes the restructuring, right-sizing, gender mainstreaming and decentralization of security sector institutions

10. Several key pieces of legislation were enacted during the reporting period. The Liberia National Police Act and the Liberia Immigration Services Act were enacted and came into force. The Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization is now called the Liberia Immigration Service. The civilian complaints boards and policy management boards established by both pieces of legislation for both institutions are yet to become operational. The boards are intended to improve the relationship between the public and the security services and enhance civilian oversight over both security agencies. The new Police Act made provision for four deputy inspectors general, who will be responsible for the following areas: administration, operations, manpower development and training, and crime services.

11. The Firearms and Ammunition Control Act was passed into law and signed by the President of Liberia. The Act replaces the now obsolete 1958 Act. Eighty-five per cent of all state security arms have been marked, recorded and controlled, and the database on security armories is 80 per cent complete.

12. To ensure effective control of small arms and light weapons in the region, a technical committee on small arms was established to provide technical support to the Liberia National Commission on Small Arms. The technical committee comprises two representatives from each government security agency.

13. The Government has established a public safety working group, which coordinates and monitors the review of the private security regulation bill and the development of a public safety road map.

14. The anti-money laundering/combating the financing of terrorism (AML/CFT) law has been enacted. The law provides that the Liberia Revenue Authority, the Liberia Anti-Corruption Commission and the Central Bank of Liberia, along with other relevant institutions, are reporting entities to assist the AML/CFT regime in combating crimes specified by the law. Regulatory frameworks are being put in place to begin enforcement of the law.

15. With regard to the decentralization of security sector institutions, the three justice and security regional hubs are operational and costs are being covered by the Government. The justice and security regional hub in Gbarnga, Bong county (hub 1) is responding to security-related crimes and potential conflict issues in three counties: Lofa, Bong and Nimba. During the period under review, the hub responded to more than 50 security incidents, ranging from mob violence and rioting to civil disobedience.

16. The Government has initiated efforts to build capacity and right-size security agencies, including by mainstreaming gender. The Liberian National Police have trained 104 officers, 30 per cent of whom are female. The Liberia Immigration Service has trained 250 officers, 31 per cent of whom are female. The Liberia Drug Enforcement Agency trained 100 officers, bringing its strength to 201 officers.

17. The Ministry of National Defense has proposed an amendment to its governing act to change the title of the Chief of Staff to the Chief of Defense Staff, consistent with elsewhere in the region. The Ministry has also drafted a bill for the establishment of a uniform court of military justice. Ahead of the passing of the proposed legislation, the Ministry of National Defense signed a memorandum of understanding with the Ministry of Justice to enhance accountability within the Armed Forces of Liberia through the civilian justice system. The Ministry has also proposed a revision of its national strategy.

18. The Bureau of Corrections and Rehabilitation revived the review process of the Prison Bill that was circulated to stakeholders by the Senate Judiciary Committee in 2014. The Bill would amend sections relating to imprisonment in the Criminal Procedure Law and the Executive Law. Consultations with stakeholders are still ongoing.

3. To ensure adequate budgetary allocations to build the capacity of institutions central to security and the rule of law

19. Excluding commitments to the transition plan of the Government of Liberia, during the fiscal year 2015/16 the Government made provision through regular budgetary allotment through the Ministry of Finance to security institutions to operate and pay salaries. The Liberian National Police received $15 million, the Liberia Immigration Service $4.9 million, the Ministry of National Defense $12.7 million and the Liberia National Commission on Small Arms $0.4 million.

4. To enhance community engagement in the security sector, including regularizing dialogue mechanisms with communities, ensuring the participation of women and youth representatives, through coordinated partnerships, effective civilian oversight of the security sector, information sharing and early-warning mechanisms

20. Enhanced community engagement and dialogue in the security sector have been supported by Government, enabling the participation of women and youth and promoting coordinated partnerships and information sharing with regional security structures, including an early warning mechanism. During the reporting period, there were seven community-level engagements through the community police watch forums; 40 per cent of the participants were women.

21. The Liberia Immigration Service engaged communities in order to build trust with those moving into Liberia, through its border community engagement programme in all 15 counties.

22. The Ministry of Internal Affairs, through the Liberia Peacebuilding Office, reactivated and supported the coordination of early warning and conflict prevention structures in 13 of the 15 counties. With the exception of Montserrado and Grand Kru counties, where county peace committees are still inactive, such committees in 13 counties received training sessions, assorted office supplies and equipment, including 15 motorbikes, 50 bicycles and 18 generators, to enhance coordination and productivity. Such committees regularly visit communities and districts to respond to potential conflict triggers, including those regarding land. Coordination has become effective in those 13 counties.

23. County security councils, which include representatives from the county, district and township level, were established to address a wide range of security issues and are functional in 12 out of 15 counties, although transportation has proven a challenge to representation beyond the district level.

5. To develop a strategic approach to addressing regional security issues and transnational crime, including by developing regional and international partnerships and supporting the West Africa Coast Initiative, in the light of the vulnerability of Liberia to drug, arms and human trafficking and illicit financial flows

24. A strategy to address regional and transnational security issues through stronger partnerships is under development and intended to strengthen the regional approach of Liberia to security, in addition to existing Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and other mechanisms.

25. In June, the President was elected as a Chair of ECOWAS. In May 2016, the Government organized a special session on the threat of terrorism in West Africa, bringing together security experts with representatives from ECOWAS member States to devise strategies for preventing and combating terrorism in the region, including through greater collaboration among West African nations. In June 2016, the President signed an executive order establishing a national early warning and response mechanism coordination centre, in accordance with the obligations of Liberia as an ECOWAS member State. The Vice-President subsequently launched the ECOWAS national early warning and rapid response mechanism in Liberia and constituted its board.

26. UNMIL and the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI) continued to support cooperation between Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire, including the elaboration of joint operational guidance for future security operations to be conducted by the two national armies, as agreed during a quadripartite security meeting held in March 2016 in Grand Bassam, Côte d'Ivoire. In June 2016, the Mano River Union held the first meeting of its joint border security and confidence-building unit since the Ebola outbreak, in Toulépleu, Côte d'Ivoire. The meeting brought together officials of both Governments, including from security agencies, and representatives of border communities and the United Nations to discuss common cross-border challenges. The meeting concluded with an agreement on a draft subregional counter-terrorism framework and a memorandum of understanding on maritime security, to be finalized and adopted by the respective ministers of defence.

27. The Liberia Drug Enforcement Agency has taken steps to fight trafficking of drugs and other harmful substances in Liberia and the subregion. In 2016, the Agency arrested and charged 89 suspects with supplies of cocaine, heroin and

marijuana worth $980,624. The Agency has a current strength of 427 personnel, of which 133 are assigned in the rural counties.

28. The Government has also established the Liberia Transnational Crimes Unit and the Liberia Financial Intelligence Unit, and strengthened the capacity of institutions combating human trafficking and illicit financial flows. The Liberia Financial Intelligence Unit, working along with the Liberia Immigration Service, the Liberia Revenue Authority, the Liberia Anti-Corruption Commission, the Central Bank of Liberia, the National Security Agency and other security agencies, drafted a counter terrorism and anti-money laundering bill, now passed into law.

6. To carry out a financial review, building on the 2013 public expenditure review, in order to determine minimum financial needs and the allocation of government resources over the next five years for the reform, restructuring and effective functioning of the security sector so as to provide for the protection of the population and similarly for the rule of law, national reconciliation and the elections in 2017

29. The Government, with support from the United Nations and the World Bank, is planning to undertake a financial review, building on the 2013 public expenditure review, to determine minimum financial needs and the allocation of government resources over the next five years for the reform, restructuring and effective functioning of the justice and security sectors. At the request of the Ministry of Finance, the United Nations and the World Bank have prepared a concept note, identified funding and planned a United Nations-World Bank scoping mission, scheduled to take place in April 2017.

B. Strengthening the rule of law

1. To address long-standing, systemic weaknesses in the criminal justice sector in line with nationally validated recommendations

30. Of the actions contained in the 17 resolutions agreed at the national criminal justice conference held in 2013 to address long-standing systemic weaknesses in the criminal justice sector, only 18 per cent have been completed and 29 per cent are yet to be started.

31. In 2016, the fast-track magistrate sitting programme fast-tracked 745 cases out of 955 (78 per cent) placed on the docket, a 17 per cent increase from 2015. An office of public defence has also been annexed to the magistrate sitting programme at Monrovia Central Prison.

32. The Government has circulated a proposal to relevant stakeholders for comments on the establishment and implementation of a case management pilot project for Montserrado county. A study to identify the root causes of pretrial detention in Liberia was completed in 2016. A subcommittee focused on plea bargaining was established. Both the Ministry of Justice and the judiciary have initiated discussions on steps leading to the development before 2018 of a revised pretrial detention policy based on the study. The judiciary has also approved standard fines and fees related to court transactions and case management to avoid prevailing irregularities.

33. The Chief Justice has transferred a number of judges to support other judges experiencing high caseloads, in an attempt to address pretrial detention issues. A draft legal aid policy has been developed and a consultative workshop for its validation is planned.

34. Between 2015 and 2017, the Government trained and deployed 39 law school graduates, bringing the total deployment to 68 since 2007. The graduates are deployed to circuit and magisterial courts in the 15 counties to serve as public defenders. Sixty college graduates are currently undergoing training to become professional magistrates to be deployed across Liberia. There are currently 110 trained magistrates. More than 50 staff of the sexual and gender-based violence crime unit of the Ministry of Justice were provided additional training to further enhance their capacity to provide adequate and timely response to cases of such violence.

2. To advance the passage and implementation of key legislation such as the Land Rights Act, the Land Authority Act, the Local Governance Act, the Gender Equity Bill, the Whistle Blowers Protection Act and the Corrupt Offences Act

35. The Liberia Land Authority Act was passed into law and printed on handbills. Bills on gender equity, land rights and local government remain before the national legislature.

36. A draft whistle-blowers and witness protection bill has been developed for discussion at a planned technical review and stakeholders validation workshop with the Liberia Anti-Corruption Commission, the Governance Commission and other stakeholders.

3. To advance the constitutional reform process in a timely manner, ensuring robust civic education and civil society engagement

37. In March 2016, a House of Representatives committee recommended that 6 of the 25 constitutional reform propositions, supported and submitted by the President in August 2015, should be taken forward to a referendum. In April 2016, a Senate committee requested the President to provide formulations of the six proposed amendments. The debate on proposition 24, which would declare Liberia a nation founded on Christian principles, has impeded progress on the constitutional review process and is yet to be resolved. Owing to delays, the constitutional referendum will not be able to take place until after the 2017 elections.

38. The Governance Commission signed a memorandum of understanding with the National Civil Society Council of Liberia, which led to the development of a database for the Council for its members across the country that are involved with the constitutional reform process in order to gather inputs from citizens. Public information officers located at the justice and security regional hubs are also supporting civic education on this topic.

4. To harmonize the traditional and statutory justice systems, including through the preparation of new legislation, in view of the constitutional provision that all persons are equal before the law and thus entitled to equal treatment thereunder, especially as related to the laws that govern throughout the country to guarantee access to justice to all Liberians

39. The Government has initiated efforts to harmonize the traditional and statutory justice systems, beginning with nationwide consultations and a national conference during 2016. The Law Reform Commission held 12 town hall consultations in 10 counties and conducted a perception survey which sampled 1,300 respondents in 5 counties on reform issues. The Law Reform Commission and partners, including the Carter Center, have begun discussions with traditional leaders to solicit further inputs in preparation of legislation that supports equal rights and access to justice for all Liberians. A national law reform policy was developed by the Law Reform Commission and was later recalled by the new board of appointed commissioners

for revision to address identified gaps. The proposal for revision is being finalized for amendment. The Government has also commenced a review of national legislative law.

5. To advance transitional justice by supporting a robust public information campaign regarding accountability in foreign courts for international humanitarian law and international human rights law violations committed in Liberia, bringing in two special procedures mandate holders, the mandates of which encompass transitional justice, the right to truth and guarantees of non-recurrence

40. A public information campaign on transitional justice and accountability, including in foreign courts, for international humanitarian law and international human rights law violations committed in Liberia, is being developed for implementation. A public information unit and website has been established at the Temple of Justice.

C. Promoting national reconciliation

1. To expedite the revision and implementation of the Strategic Road Map for National Healing, Peacebuilding and Reconciliation (2013-2030), including the national history project and the review of national symbols, to foster national unity

41. A two-day review of the Strategic Road Map for National Healing, Peacebuilding and Reconciliation is planned for 2017, with financial support from UNMIL. The Road Map was developed through an extensive consultative process during 2011 and 2012 and was launched alongside the "Liberia Rising 2030" national vision and the Agenda for Transformation in December 2012. Only 5 of the Road Map's 12 thematic areas have been partially funded over the past three years. With respect to the national history project and review of national symbols, no progress was made during the reporting period.

2. To ensure the implementation of legislation aimed at decentralization and land reform, including the Local Government Act, to rebuild and maintain public trust in the Government and its institutions while enhancing social cohesion and addressing intergroup tensions, especially in preparation for the presidential election in 2017, and for the bills on land rights and the Liberia Land Authority, which will ensure the security of land tenure for the majority of Liberians and improve land administration, respectively

42. The Liberia Land Authority Act was passed into law and printed on handbills, and officials of the Liberia Land Authority were appointed in February 2017 by the President. The interim land task force established in 2015 had facilitated the process of creating the Liberia Land Authority and supporting land coordination centres in five counties.

43. The Land Rights Bill remains at the national legislature pending legislative enactment. Civil society organizations and the authorities of the land task force are engaged in a public outreach campaign on the Bill to advocate for its passage.

44. The Local Government Bill was submitted by the President to the legislature for passage and remains before the legislature.

45. The Government is implementing its decentralization programme, beginning with improving social services in 7 of the 15 counties of Liberia. In 2016, the Ministry of Internal Affairs collaborated with line government ministries and agencies to open seven county service centres around the country. The centres

provide a range of public and legal services, including the issuance of birth certificates, business and driver's licences, and deeds, which was previously available only in Monrovia. The Government has committed to establishing service centres in all 15 counties by January 2018.

3. To support the role of the Peacebuilding Office in Monrovia in coordination and collaboration to ensure the Government's development and implementation of peace and reconciliation programmes

46. During the reporting period, the Government provided office accommodation, electricity, security and janitorial services to the Peacebuilding Office in Monrovia. The running of the Office remains largely dependent on donor support, as has been the case since its establishment in 2009. The Peacebuilding Fund is the single largest supporter of the Office. The Government has committed to making operational provision for the Office in the 2017/18 fiscal budget.

47. To support its work in the development and implementation of peace and reconciliation programmes, the Peacebuilding Office supported the completion of a nationwide conflict analysis report. The Office, through the Ministry of Internal Affairs, has requested county administrations, with support from the county peace committees, to engage in a dialogue on resolving conflict issues identified in each county.

48. A national early warning group, comprised of 34 institutions, is coordinated by the Peacebuilding Office. The group is being decentralized at the county and district levels, linked to three response centres located at the justice and security regional hubs and to 160 early warming focal points, who will collect and transmit data. This infrastructure will be linked to the National Centre for the Coordination of Early Response established by the Government in 2016 under the auspices of ECOWAS.

49. Relationships between the 15 county legislative caucuses and county administrations have been strained as a result of tensions concerning the administration and management of the county and social development funds. Upon the request of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Peacebuilding Office undertook dialogues in 13 of the 15 counties which focused on conflict management and team building through workshops held with legislative caucuses and county administrations. Relationships between the two sides have improved as a result of the intervention.

4. To strengthen the capacity of key institutions to advance national dialogue on peace and reconciliation, as recommended in the report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and prioritize interventions aimed at empowering youth and women

50. There were initial delays in advancing national reconciliation, with the Palava Hut initiative stalled. The Palava Hut process later commenced, with the completion of two hearings in Lofa and Grand Gedeh counties. County peace committees, the local-level conflict management mechanism, are now functional, with 15 established at the county level and presences in three districts. Additional funding is required for full decentralization to all districts.

51. The Ministry of Internal Affairs, through the Peacebuilding Office, trained 90 junior national volunteers from 90 communities in peacebuilding and conflict mitigation. The volunteers then transferred knowledge through mentoring to 900 community peace committee members from 90 communities. The committee members serve as ambassadors of peace at the community level by assisting to resolve low-level conflict.

52. UNMIL, through its quick-impact projects, provided support for the work of the Peace Ambassador, William Tolbert III, including the consultations held in June 2016 with eminent persons on peacebuilding priorities and potential triggers for social unrest leading up to the 2017 elections. On 11 May 2016, the Peace Ambassador organized remembrance ceremonies, with the participation of Christian and Muslim young people, for the victims of the civil conflict, focusing on youth participation. The Government has disbursed $175,000 to the Office of the Peace Ambassador to carry out his mandate.

5. To revise and implement the peacebuilding and reconciliation outreach and communications plan intended to mobilize mass citizen support for and participation in the implementation of the Government's peacebuilding and reconciliation programmes

53. A draft communication strategy was developed to create a space for public dialogue and participation in national reconciliation and peacebuilding initiatives. With funding support from a quick-impact project of UNMIL, 50 town hall meetings and 15 dialogue sessions were held across the country on the contents of the reconciliation road map, as an attempt to increase ownership and enhance the sustainability of projects implemented under the road map.

6. To provide targeted support, for example through social cohesion initiatives, to civil society organizations, including community-based organizations, in particular women's and youth organizations at the local level, to enable them to participate in the planning and implementation of various peacebuilding and reconciliation programmes across the country

54. The Ministry of Youth and Sports and the Ministry of Internal Affairs worked with a number of community-based organizations to promote social cohesion among youth and women. For example, the Ministry of Internal Affairs provided small grants to 14 organizations (two of which were women's organizations and two of which were youth organizations) to promote social cohesion, reconciliation and peacebuilding across Liberia.

55. With support from the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), 900 young people from 90 communities, working through community peace committees, implemented social reconciliatory activities in six counties, focused on improving social interaction, reducing inter-ethnic and religious tensions and promoting community development.

56. The Ministry of Youth and Sports, through its social cohesion programme, supported young people in the development of peacebuilding skills. The Ministry organized community forums covering issues such as domestic violence and early marriage among young women. As part of plans to encourage, identify and promote talents among young high school students, the Ministry conducted high school debates and quizzes.

57. In view of the limited number of qualified personnel in the counties, the National Youth Service Program trained, employed and deployed young university graduates across Liberia for one year to provide support in teaching and administration in schools and county administrations, as well as nursing and agriculture.

58. The United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) and partners supported the establishment and strengthening of 27 women's peace huts across the country, where women have been mediating local conflicts, acting as watchdogs over the security and justice services and mobilizing women to participate in local political and peacebuilding processes.

D. Promoting peaceful and inclusive elections in 2017

1. To prepare an electoral budget based on a realistic assessment of the ability of Liberia to sustain financial and operational requirements for the elections

59. An electoral budget based on a realistic assessment of the ability of Liberia to sustain financial and operational requirements for the 2017 elections was prepared, and the Government committed $20 million out of the total election budget of $42 million for the fiscal year 2016/17. Despite the fact that the Government has been supported by international partners, funding for the conducting of elections remains a challenge.

2. To take steps to increase the representation of women in elected institutions

60. In September 2016, the House of Representatives and Senate passed the Equal Representation and Participation Act of 2016, reserving seven seats in the House of Representatives: five seats for women, one for youth and one for the disabled. Women currently comprise only 12 per cent of the legislature and hold only 6 per cent of local government positions.

61. To further support increased representation of women in elected institutions, leadership training for women has been held with the support of the National Elections Commission and the United States Agency for International Development. More than 75 women participated in these training sessions.

3. To implement a broad campaign of civic education and voter education that connects themes of democratic participation and inclusion to broader questions of reconciliation, the rule of law and security within the overall context of peace consolidation

62. The National Elections Commission conducted a number of voter education campaigns around the country, encouraging eligible citizens to register, with an emphasis on women voters. More than 2 million Liberians registered to vote. Voter registration started on 1 February and was to end on 7 March, but was extended by one week to 14 March. The voter registration process was led by the National Elections Commission, with technical support provided by the United Nations Development Programme and the International Foundation for Electoral Systems. All of the optical mark recognition forms collected from voter registration centres are being processed by the National Elections Commission. The processing of the more than 2 million forms is progressing very slowly owing to the incompatibility of the optical mark recognition forms with the scanner.

4. To put in place a set of dialogue mechanisms between entities within the security forces that will be engaged in providing security for the 2017 elections and the population at the community level, with a particular focus on the participation of both young women and young men

63. With Government budgetary support, the Ministry of Justice and the Liberian National Police, in partnership with civil society organizations, have set up dialogue mechanisms involving entities within the security forces that will be engaged in providing security for the 2017 elections and the population at the community level. Dialogue mechanisms have also been jointly established with political parties to respond to queries and resolve election-related issues before, during and after elections.

64. The Peacebuilding Office, in conjunction with the National Elections Commission and the Elections Coordinating Committee, conducted training sessions

on election dispute management and conflict mitigation for 35 community-based organizations from five counties of Liberia. A number of those trained were voter registration observers and civic education personnel. In partnership with the African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes, this process will continue. Further in support of peaceful and inclusive elections, the Peacebuilding Office, together with a youth organization called Young Ambassadors for Peace, are engaging the youth wings of the 22 political parties through dialogue on election disputes and by holding reconciliation tournaments in 73 electoral districts in the 15 counties from April onwards.

5. To ensure that the security agencies providing security for the elections are properly trained and prepared and that the necessary funding is received on time and encourage the establishment of a code of conduct between the presidential candidates

65. The Inter-Party Consultative Committee held a three-day working session to prepare a code of conduct in support of free, fair and transparent elections in 2017.

66. The Liberian National Police plan to train an additional 600 police officers to increase police presence in areas previously occupied by UNMIL personnel prior to the 2017 elections. The Liberian National Police have also increased engagement with local communities in support of conflict prevention.

67. The Government has allocated $2 million in its 2016/17 budget to cover security costs for the election. The estimated total costs for security provided by the Liberian National Police in the lead-up to the elections and transition to a new Government is $4.6 million.

E. Human rights

1. To implement the national human rights action plan and the recommendations contained in the universal periodic review report on Liberia (A/HRC/30/4)

68. Several actions have been taken towards implementation of the national human rights action plan. A national steering committee has been established and is functioning. Regional consultative workshops have been held in Maryland, Grand Gedeh, Gbarpolu and Montserrado counties to familiarize citizens with the national human rights action plan and engage with local government, civil society organizations and other actors.

69. The secretariat of the national human rights action plan has identified focal points in Government ministries and agencies that are considered "agents of change" under the action plan. These persons will be trained to monitor and report on the progress of implementation of the action plan with their different ministries and agencies. The midterm review of the action plan will be held in June 2017.

70. As part of the commitments of Liberia in the action plan to fulfil its international treaty reporting obligations, the Government submitted the common core document and its first report under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights in 2016, and is currently in the process of completing its first report under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

71. Implementation of the recommendations of the universal periodic review report of September 2015, which called for at least 50 per cent of recommendations to be implemented during the period under review, has been slow owing to insufficient resources. Thus far, some of the recommendations in the report are being taken forward by the national human rights action plan. It is anticipated that in early 2018 an interministerial committee will be established to coordinate full

implementation of the recommendations as accepted by Liberia and prepare for the submission of the progress report in 2020.

2. To capacitate the Independent National Commission on Human Rights to carry out its mandate in line with the principles relating to the status of national institutions for the promotion and protection of human rights (the Paris Principles)

72. The capacity of the Independent National Commission on Human Rights has been significantly enhanced, including by the establishment of five statutory departments. Staff recruited include the executive director, three directors, procurement officers, human rights monitors, technical assistants and support staff. The Commission at present has 23 human rights monitors deployed around the country, with plans to establish regional and county offices and to recruit and deploy an additional 20 human rights monitors.

73. The Independent National Commission on Human Rights undertook a study tour to Geneva to learn about various international and regional human rights mechanisms and systems, including treaty bodies, special procedures and the universal periodic review process. The study visit with the secretariat of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in Geneva paved the way for the accreditation of the Commission with the Global Alliance for National Human Rights Institutions in March 2017 in Geneva, demonstrating the compliance of the Commission with the principles relating to the status of national institutions for the promotion and protection of human rights (the Paris Principles) of December 1993. The Commission also conducted study visits with the Kenya Human Rights Commission; the Network of African National Human Rights Institutions, based in Nairobi; and the Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone. These visits allowed the Commission to re-establish relationships with a regional body, share cross-county experiences on human rights and transitional justice and forge strategic partnerships with other national human rights institutions. The Commission has developed its five-year strategic plan for the period 2016-2021.

74. In 2016, the Independent National Commission on Human Rights released its 2015 annual report on the human rights situation of the country. In January 2016, it released a thematic report on the conditions of prisons and prisoners across Liberia. The Commission has set up procedures for handling complaints, and received more than 40 complaints in 2016.

III. Commitments by the Peacebuilding Commission

1. To generate sustained attention and undertake measures to advocate within the international community for support to the peacebuilding process by highlighting progress in, as well as challenges to and risks and opportunities of, peacebuilding efforts in the country

75. On 17 March 2016, the Chair of the Peacebuilding Commission Liberia configuration made a statement to the Security Council in which he addressed the ongoing peacebuilding priorities of Liberia and the security transition. On 2 May 2016, the Chair convened an ambassadorial-level configuration meeting to launch the revised statement of mutual commitments, which highlights peacebuilding priorities during the current transition in Liberia. In June, the Chair joined the Peacebuilding Commission mission to West Africa (Guinea, Liberia, Senegal and Sierra Leone) to explore the subregional peacebuilding opportunities and challenges in the region on the road to recovery after the Ebola outbreak. During the visit, discussions focused on the priorities identified in the statement of mutual

commitments on peacebuilding in Liberia, including security sector development, the rule of law, national reconciliation and peaceful elections in 2017. A number of other peacebuilding priorities were identified during the discussions, including the need to promote good governance, build capacities among youth, generate employment, strengthen the educational system, construct a more efficient health-care system and ensure equal treatment of religious and ethnic groups. Concerns were raised by interlocutors about the imminent drawdown of UNMIL and general elections scheduled for the following year.

76. On 25 August 2016, the Chair again briefed the Security Council on recent peacebuilding developments in the country. On 9 November 2016, the Chair convened a meeting of the configuration at the ambassadorial level to brief on his October trip and the stakeholder forum he had organized in Liberia, to discuss the current socioeconomic challenges with the World Bank and receive an update on UNMIL transition planning. In December 2016, the Chair addressed the Council formally and informally in advance of its deliberations on the future of the United Nations peacekeeping presence in Liberia.

2. To advocate for the generation of necessary resources for the peacebuilding priorities identified in the statement of mutual commitments

77. The statement of mutual commitments provided the framework for the peacebuilding plan requested by the Security Council under resolution 2333 (2016). A configuration meeting was scheduled for April to introduce to the Peacebuilding Commission the priorities identified in the plan and to call for further support for the peacebuilding needs and priorities identified in the plan. During the reporting period, the Chair sought to increase partnership with international financial institutions, in particular, the World Bank to ensure better financial predictability and long-term support from these institutions to Liberia. Conducting a United Nations-World Bank public expenditure review in 2017 and early 2018 will support this effort.

78. 2016 marked the end of all projects in support of the Peacebuilding Fund's $30 million, two-phase investment in Liberia since 2011. With support from the Fund, three justice and security hubs have become operational in support of the decentralization of justice services. At the county level, county peace committees now play a key mediating role in various local-level conflicts, and the Palava Hut process, aimed at supporting dialogue and healing for war-related violations, is incrementally advancing. At the community level, peace huts provide space for women to actively participate in all stages of peacebuilding and help address domestic violence. The Liberia-Côte d'Ivoire cross-border project aimed at increasing cooperation and trust between Ivorian and Liberian border communities has commenced.

79. Going forward, the Peacebuilding Fund has highlighted its willingness to supplement the Government's investment in transition priorities, as highlighted in the statement of mutual commitments and the Peacebuilding Plan. The Fund is working closely with the Government and United Nations leadership to identify specific priority areas for Fund investment for 2017-2019.

3. To generate and sustain international attention and support for the 2017 elections

80. On 20 October 2016, the Chair co-hosted, with the Government of Liberia, a multi-stakeholder forum in which elections were a key issue of focus. A preparatory workshop for the forum focused solely on preparations for the 2017 elections. The Peacebuilding Commission trip to West Africa also included a meeting with the

National Elections Commission of Liberia. Planned expert-level and ambassadorial-level meetings of the configuration in April 2017 include discussion of the preparations for the 2017 elections, with a briefing planned from the National Elections Commission. The Chair's upcoming visit to Liberia will also have a substantial focus on the elections and how the Peacebuilding Commission can be of support.

4. To continue its political accompaniment role to sustain attention to peacebuilding-related issues as part of the ongoing security transition in Liberia

81. The Chair has been engaged in the ongoing transition process of Liberia, together with partners in the United Nations and in Liberia, to sustain attention on the country's long-term needs throughout the transition, as UNMIL draws down and beyond. In addition to the Peacebuilding Commission configuration meetings, country visits, meetings and events with stakeholders in Liberia, the configuration has followed and provided input to the development of a peacebuilding plan requested under Security Council resolution 2333 (2016), which directs the role of the United Nations system and other relevant partners, including multilateral and bilateral actors, in supporting the transition of Liberia.

5. To encourage the wide participation of partners, including civil society, in Peacebuilding Commission activities through which support can be garnered for Liberia

82. The Chair co-hosted with the Government of Liberia the multi-stakeholder forum on 20 October 2016 in Monrovia, which gathered over 100 stakeholders in Liberia, including government representatives, political parties, civil society (including women's and youth organizations), the United Nations and other international community representatives. The Chair has also continued to engage with civil society during his country visits and has invited representatives to speak in Liberia configuration meetings.

6. To advocate for the importance of equal participation of women, youth and the disabled in all spheres of political, economic, social and cultural life as an essential condition for a fair and inclusive society

83. The Chair has continued to advocate for the empowerment of women and youth in Liberia through his statements to the Security Council and in meetings with a wide range of stakeholders in Liberia, and through the implementation of the Peacebuilding Commission gender strategy (2016).

84. A Peacebuilding Fund project aimed at strengthening the participation of women in the resolution of conflicts related to the management of natural resources, implemented by Educare, the first national non-governmental organization to receive funding directly from Peacebuilding Fund, was approved in 2016. This project builds on the women's peace huts initiative supported by Fund and other partners until the end of 2016. The Fund is currently finalizing the approval of a project focused on enhancing the participation of young men and women in the 2017 elections. Going forward, investments focused on empowering women and engaging youth in peacebuilding efforts will be prioritized by the Fund.

7. To work with regional actors, in particular the African Union, the Economic Community of West African States and the Mano River Union, and rely upon their interventions in building durable peace in Liberia

85. In October 2016, the Chair took part in the Peacebuilding Commission mission to African Union headquarters in Addis Ababa. The mission was part of the Commission's ongoing efforts to enhance synergies and complementarities between the work of the United Nations and the African Union Peace and Security Council. Discussions highlighted that the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Agenda 2063: the Africa We Want were mutually reinforcing and coherent frameworks to enhance cooperation. Also recognized was the importance of conflict prevention and the addressing of the root causes of conflicts.

86. During the June 2016 trip by the Chair to West Africa, subregional discussions were held with the Mano River Union secretariat, located in Freetown. Discussions highlighted the important role of regional and subregional organizations in sustaining peace in Africa, focusing on political, socioeconomic and cross-border peacebuilding priorities. It was also agreed that the Peacebuilding Commission and subregional organizations, such as the Mano River Union, needed to continue to focus on those key priority areas, with a view to putting national and subnational strategies first and strengthening their relationship. In addition, they held discussions with representatives of Senegal, in its capacity as the former chair of ECOWAS, as well as Liberia, in its capacity as incoming Chair. Discussions focused on the growing cross-border and transnational threats to peace and stability in West Africa and the Sahel, including terrorism, radicalization and violent extremism, and transnational crimes. The delegation noted the importance of a multidimensional approach, going beyond military and security responses and focusing on addressing the root causes in affected communities, particularly in border areas.

87. On 7 September 2016, the Peacebuilding Commission organized a meeting with the Mano River Union, focusing on peacebuilding opportunities in this region, including Liberia and neighbouring countries, in the post-Ebola recovery context. On 17 November 2016, the Commission held a meeting on African Union-United Nations cooperation at United Nations Headquarters in New York, in which regional and cross-border issues that affected Liberia were discussed.

8. To advise the Government and people of Liberia on lessons learned from experience gained in similar situations in other countries while providing political leverage to help ensure the successful implementation of the related process

88. Several meetings on good practices in peacebuilding were convened by the Peacebuilding Commission in the fall of 2016. On 7 October 2016, the Commission convened an expert-level meeting on the topic "The challenge of sustaining peace: lessons from previous transitions". The purpose of the meeting was to initiate a conversation within the Commission on what lessons could be drawn from peacebuilding experiences in countries in transition, including the early Peacebuilding Commission engagements in Burundi and Sierra Leone, as well as in Timor-Leste, that were relevant to United Nations engagement in countries such as Liberia.

89. The preparation of a peacebuilding plan for Liberia drew on lessons learned from the development of plans in other contexts, such as the national plan for recovery and peacebuilding in the Central African Republic and the recovery and peacebuilding assessment.

9. In advance of Security Council deliberations on the future mandate of the United Nations presence in Liberia, to contribute to those deliberations by convening multi-stakeholder forum on Liberia to discuss peacebuilding priorities and on that basis, provide succinct and targeted advice on those priorities to the Security Council, if requested

90. The Chair co-hosted, together with the Government of Liberia, a multi-stakeholder forum on 20 October 2016 in Monrovia. Over 100 stakeholders in Liberia took part in the forum, including representatives of the Government (members of the executive (ministries, agencies and commissions), the legislature and the judiciary), political parties, civil society (including women's and youth organizations), the United Nations and other members of the international community. The forum focused its discussions on two topics: "How to ensure that root causes of conflict are being addressed during and beyond transition" and "What the support to sustaining peace in Liberia should look like post-UNMIL". These discussion questions were chosen to complement the strategic review of UNMIL, carried out earlier in 2016. Key areas that needed strengthening to ensure sustained peace in Liberia included the capacity and accountability of institutions, the strengthening of national identity, conflict prevention and transformative initiatives around peaceful 2017 elections, the participation of youth and women in peace processes and policy planning, access to livelihood and social services, State-citizen relations and human rights for improving socioeconomic development.

91. In September 2016, the Peacebuilding Support Office participated in the strategic review, led by the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, to develop recommendations on the possible withdrawal of UNMIL and the transition to a future United Nations presence, to ensure that peacebuilding priorities crucial to the peacebuilding process of Liberia are assessed and taken into account.

10. To contribute to supporting Liberia in its peacebuilding efforts by collaborating closely with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, the United Nations Mission in Liberia, the United Nations country team and international partners, including international financial institutions, on the above commitments; encouraging effective coordination between the United Nations and other actors with respect to supporting the implementation of national strategies; and reaching out to other relevant international stakeholders

92. Since the adoption of Security Council resolution 2333 (2016), the Peacebuilding Commission has been engaged with the United Nations and other stakeholders in the development of a peacebuilding plan to direct the role of the United Nations system and other relevant partners, including multilateral and bilateral actors, in supporting the transition of Liberia.

93. In Monrovia, the Peacebuilding Office, supported by funding from the Peacebuilding Fund, was designated to coordinate the efforts of the various ministries and departments of the Government of Liberia in the development of the peacebuilding plan. A Peacebuilding Commission country configuration expert-level meeting was held on 26 January 2017 to engage in a discussion with representatives of UNMIL and the Government of Liberia. Key issues raised in this meeting were the need for consultation with civil society, political actors, the United Nations country team and the donor community, and for the plan to build upon existing frameworks related to peacebuilding, such as the Agenda for Transformation and the statement of mutual commitments between the Government of Liberia and the Peacebuilding Commission.

94. Following this meeting, a joint mission comprising key multilateral partners, engaged by the Peacebuilding Support Office as co-chairs of the high-level advisory

group, was dispatched to Monrovia in early February to work with the Government of Liberia and UNMIL during the first round of national consultations. After further meetings held with the country configuration, consolidated opinions from the Peacebuilding Commission were sent to Monrovia. The second and final draft was circulated to members of the configuration on 10 March 2017. On 20 March 2017, the peacebuilding plan was sent to the Secretary-General, who presented it to the Security Council on 4 April. The peacebuilding plan refers to the Peacebuilding Commission as one of the entities that will have a monitoring role, jointly with the Government of Liberia, the United Nations system, bilateral and multilateral actors, regional organizations and representatives of Liberian civil society.

IV. Conclusion

95. In 2016 and the first quarter of 2017, some notable progress has been seen in the implementation of commitments of both the Government of Liberia and the Peacebuilding Commission under the current statement of mutual commitments. Significantly, the report period saw the assumption by the Government of Liberia of its security responsibilities from UNMIL on 30 June 2016.

96. Structural changes with respect to the security and rule of law sectors and human rights, including the passage of long awaited legislation and substantive support to institutions, including the Independent National Commission on Human Rights, have also occurred. It will be important for this work to be consolidated over the coming year.

97. Under the current statement of mutual commitments, there remains a significant number of commitments that have not yet been accomplished, particularly in the area of national reconciliation. Limited resources and capacity have played a large role in this, and a concerted effort to overcome these challenges in the forthcoming period is required, including ensuring that processes put in place in support of commitments translate into meaningful outcomes and have an impact on sustaining peace. Political factors, particularly in the lead-up to the 2017 elections, have also had a significant role in impeding progress on the statement of mutual commitments.

98. Review of phase I of the new peacebuilding plan of Liberia, prior to the departure of UNMIL, will also encompass the final review of the current statement of mutual commitments and explore options for underwriting phase II of the peacebuilding plan with a framework for mutual accountability. This will be an important opportunity for the Peacebuilding Commission to support the plan as the forum for mutual accountability and joint monitoring for the United Nations and the Government of Liberia.